

September 14, 1945

Some Information Policy and Planning Problems

— 0 —

- (1) USDA reorganization renews information challenge.
- (2) Decentralizing the dissemination of national agricultural information.
- (3) The squeeze on education by radio.
- (4) Publications that talk.
- (5) EERC recommendations.

(1) U.S.D.A. Reorganization Renews Information Challenge.

General Situation. - As the first step in USDA reorganization under Secretary Anderson, the FMA was established as a basic and highly influential agency of the Department. It will be responsible for many programs of vital import to farm people.... and which farm people will need to understand before they can participate. Some of these programs will be concerned with:

Production
Marketing
Adjustment
Loan
Subsidy
Diversion
Export Import
Price Support
Marketing Quotas
Marketing Agreements
Surplus Disposal, and the like

Farm people will need to be informed on FMA policies, programs, and procedures in these and similar fields. This raises important

OCT 10 1945

questions of:

- (a) How can the information be effectively adapted to State and county situations to support and reenforce local programs; and,
- (b) How can the individual farmer be swiftly and authoritatively informed?

Of course, all available national media.....press, radio, farm magazines, etc.....will be utilized. However, this is not sufficient since information becomes more effective the closer the source is to the farmer. That means information support from the State level and the county level also.

The Cooperative Extension Service is the educational arm of USDA, and education includes the information processes. In view of this and the already existing professionally trained, long experienced, highly competent, and influential Extension information staff in most States, it would seem logical to use Extension editors and county agents to handle PMA information.

James B. Hasselman, who some years ago was Michigan extension editor, has been selected as information director of the PMA. With his long experience in Extension, he will naturally take that background into consideration in formulating his information policy. However, he will need to base his decision upon the most effective way to reach through information channels every farmer concerned.

Although no definite decision can be reached until administrative problems and relationships are worked out, he has expressed the hope that his agency will be able to rely very largely on the Cooperative Extension Service to handle local adaptation and distribution of necessary field information, at both the State and county levels. Whether or not that hope is fulfilled will depend greatly upon the extent to which State extension services can give necessary cooperation to meet fully the requirements of the PMA. Where State extension services are not prepared to furnish this service, the PMA (or other agency) will naturally feel that it must set up its own minimum information service.

The Extension Problem. - A public administrator believes that the programs for which he is responsible, in which public funds are invested and which generally express a public

need, must be interpreted to those concerned. Looking at it from the point of view of farm people, Extension recognizes the importance of such interpretation in the educational and informational support that it gives to national and regional agricultural programs.

Extension further believes in the localization principle.....that a national program must be coordinated with State and local research and situations, that it must, to be successful, be interpreted in terms of local farmer psychology and practice. It also believes that overlapping and duplication in the information going out must be avoided to overcome waste, antagonism, and failure of the program. It does not believe in propaganda, but, on the contrary, that information, to be effective, must be based upon facts.

If Extension is to accept and act upon the responsibility of handling information for PMA and other national agricultural programs, many of the problems could be worked out by the cooperative processes; by the formulation, adherence to, and effectuation of national policies which would support the principles for which Extension stands without jeopardizing the dissemination of information on such programs; and by instituting proper procedures to make such operation practical. We in Extension now have a splendid opportunity for starting from scratch to work with the PMA in developing such policies and such procedures.

Any information policies set up must, naturally, reflect administrative policies of the Cooperative Extension Service and involve both the USDA and the Land-Grant Colleges. However, for purposes of discussion to clarify some of the issues involved, the following tentative statement is submitted for consideration:

- (a) It is desirable that one central point in a State or county carry the responsibility for insuring that all persons affected be promptly and accurately informed through information channels of developments in PMA (or other national agricultural) programs, about which they should be acquainted to insure participation. Since that is desirable, it would be important for State and county extension services to set up the necessary cooperative procedures to work with other State and county agricultural agencies so that such agencies will depend upon and recognize them as the primary outlet for the factual agricultural information that farm people need.
- (b) It would be desirable for the State (and county) extension service to prepare, or clear, and disseminate all materials for mass

dissemination to farm people through the press, on the radio, in publications, or in other ways, which are needed in the process of instructing rural people in the improvement of subject matter, economic, marketing, and management practices relevant to a particular program. It is important, though, that the program agency's administrative officials be kept informed regarding releases which concern their field of action and that any conflicts in policy be mutually compromised and agreed upon before release to farm people.

- (c) It is generally understood that any Government operating agency, by virtue of its lawful administrative responsibilities, must effectively discharge its obligations to (1) keep people informed regarding policies, decisions, regulations, changes, procedures of operation, etc.; and, (2) account publicly for the stewardship of the funds entrusted to it by Congress, such accounting being in the nature of reports to the public on activities undertaken, progress made, and results obtained. Agreements between the PMA (or other agency) and Extension at State levels might be developed in order that all factual information necessary to a complete understanding will reach farm people promptly and effectively. When State extension services assume these obligations by mutual agreement, releases should be carefully cleared with the source of information before release.

(2) Decentralizing the Dissemination of National Agricultural Information.

General Situation. - The great progress made in the variety, quality, and effectiveness of communication media (press, radio) has increased amazingly the speed with which agricultural information can be disseminated from a central point. This quickened pace of communication media and the need for advising farm people swiftly on changes in national programs in themselves exert a great force toward the centralized dissemination of information. Public opinion polling and studies constantly being made in the field spotlight the phases of the program which need further strengthening and upon which more information must be supplied to promote understanding and participation.

However, the USDA, through its Office of Information, although recognizing the value of using national media, realizes that information

cannot be completely effective unless it is adapted and applied to local situations, knowledge, psychology, and experience. For this reason, the Office of Information is recognizing more and more the services of the Cooperative Extension Service in disseminating to rural areas information on national agricultural objectives, policies, and programs. In view of this, every effort is being made to enable State extension services to interpret national agricultural information in terms of localized application.

Procedures have been set up in cooperation with the Office of Information to further the objective of integrated national and State information in the interests of the farm people. Steps have already been taken to:

(A) Coordinate USDA with college publications by.....

(a) Controlled distribution, which:

- (1) Insures that bulk supplies go to States only when the directors ask for them.
- (2) Provides for giving States advance knowledge of bulletins proposed and bases editions upon preliminary orders placed.

(b) Integrated planning of USDA-College publications program by:

- (1) Sending States advance lists of USDA publications considered for printing.
- (2) Asking States for advance lists of publications in the mill.

(B) Distribution of USDA radio transcriptions through State extension editors and by them to radio stations. This plan was adopted to avoid the unintentional broadcasting of agricultural information in a State where the subject matter doesn't apply, and also to permit the extension editor to supply additional, more localized subject matter, to supplement the transcriptions with live talks by State or county extension workers, and otherwise incorporate the transcriptions in his own program

(C) Distribution of motion pictures for rural showings through State extension services.

The Extension Problem. - These represent new policies and procedures which reflect the truism that information is not effective unless locally adapted and applied. They have brought to the Cooperative Extension Service a greatly increased responsibility and opportunity for service. But they have also brought considerably more work, for it is necessary to handle a vast amount of details and relationships to insure that the entire program of handling information in this way is working effectively. The additional work, however, is in furtherance of objectives long sought and the kind that will serve farmer and national interests most effectively.

Should we continue to work toward policies and procedures which will channel national information through the Cooperative Extension Service.....and will it be possible for the States to set up the procedures, facilities, and personnel to handle?

(3) The Squeeze on Education by Radio.

General Situation. - Recent and continuing developments have put a squeeze on education by radio. College stations have found it increasingly harder to secure adequate frequencies, time or power. The scramble for advertising space on commercial stations and networks has made it increasingly hard for extension and other educational workers to get suitable and dependable time on the air.

Yet, we have ample proof that radio is one of our major educational tools. We recall how well radio has kept us informed about the war. We remember its power in political campaigns, how it has helped sell bonds, recruit farm workers, give market information, and the like. In a recent Extension Service study in Ward County, N. D., an average of one-third of the farmers in the county were listening every time the county agent went on the air. He was reaching many farmers he did not normally reach.

The Extension Problem. - Our administrative job in radio is to provide the facilities for broadcasting on college or commercial stations, and see that our workers are trained in using radio effectively.

Education generally permitted itself to be pretty much left out back in 1921 in the allocation of frequencies for our present radio system. A new kind of radio broadcasting, frequency modulation (FM) with truer tone, practically no static and a chance for many more low-powered local stations, is just around the corner. Education has been allocated enough FM frequencies to allow 500 or more new education stations. If we don't apply for them and use them they will soon go by default to the commercial interests clamoring for them. Twenty-eight States have been seriously considering FM educational networks to cover the State. Here we may have to join with the other educational institutions in joint use of educational stations. Whether we get our own FM stations or not, surely FM, which most radio authorities agree will be the major future method of broadcasting, will make more local stations available for our agents to use in reaching rural people.

Also the Federal Communications Commission is looking seriously into rural coverage by the more powerful, clear-channel, present day standard broadcasting stations. A hearing is being held this October, at which the Land-Grant College Association, the Department of Agriculture, and farm organizations are being represented. Radio stations are licensed to serve the public interest and necessity. The more powerful stations are granted extra power to serve the more rural areas. The Commission is asking whether or not they are meeting the needs.

There are several other things we need to consider in terms of providing radio time for extension workers:

- (a) How far can we go in accepting advertising sponsorship of educational programs? The Department some time ago revised its policy and accepts time in advertising sponsored programs under certain restrictions and conditions that it can approve. Many State extension services are following the same lead, realizing that there are policy problems in the picture. Is that the direction in which we should travel?
- (b) Many stations have established farm service programs of their own. Are we encouraging fullest cooperation with their LOC or more farm program directors? This is a relatively new development.
- (c) What can we do now to make better use of or obtain college or other educational stations, both in the FM and standard broadcasting fields. Can we help to protect the airways from complete

encroachment by commercial programs.....must we join with commercial interests by organizing educational programs on sponsored time.....do we have the money to establish, equip, and maintain college owned stations and to provide the personnel to plan and broadcast high standard educational programs?

We can do much in training our agents and State workers in effective use of radio. During the last year we have assisted a number of States in holding radio training schools for the State staff and selected agents. It has been one of the most popular, and probably most effective, things we have done.

(4) Publications That Talk.

General Situation. - Sample survey testing of popular publications on prospective readers shows clearly that many of them fail to reach the objective for which they were intended -- to convey practical information that will result in improved farm and home methods. Studies point to the fact that frequently bulletins are unintentionally written at the college reading level, in language that can be most easily understood by specialists and leaders. Their message, however, is difficult to grasp by the persons who have no more than a grade school education and who need the information the most. Such bulletins are not designed for easy reading and use, are too long, and try to cover too many ideas.

More than a million dollars a year are spent by the Cooperative Extension Service on publications. But to the cost of writing, editing, printing, and distributing the bulletins should be added the estimated value of time wasted by farm people who try to read the bulletins and fail to get their message.

The Extension Problem. - Publications are one of our major teaching tools. They supplement and strengthen most of our other teaching methods. Some of the States are studying their popular publications to determine if they are written in terms of the educational level of the audience to be reached. All writers of Extension publications should give consideration to this problem.

Some of the steps that might be taken to make Extension publications more effective are:

- (a) Can we train specialists and others who write popular publications in the psychology and simple techniques of writing for the

intended reader. The application of readability workshops, like the ones recently held at Columbia University, and in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, to State staff conferences will help.

- (b) We can have our publications checked to determine the educational level in which they are written. There are approved formulae for such checking, and the Division of Field Studies and Training can do considerable such checking for the States. Such checks give directors and editors good data for use in training work with publications writers.
- (c) We can study the effectiveness of a few publications, preferably by surveying a sample audience of farm people for whom they were written, to determine what the farmers think of them. The Federal Extension Service will be glad to assist in such surveys.
- (d) We can do much to set standards for publications in terms of type of people they are intended to reach; their schooling level, interest, age, sex, and other characteristics of the reader.

Above all, publications to be effective must:

- (a) Be readable -- written in words and sentences that the intended reader can easily understand.
- (b) Be legible -- set in large enough type and arranged so it is easy to read and inviting.
- (c) Teach -- simplicity, clarity, clear objectives and exact directions are important. Sometimes a good picture with very little type will do the specific job desired.

(5) EEAC Recommendations.

For the past two years, the Division of Extension Information has invited to Washington a number of Extension editors to act as an Extension Editor Advisory Committee. This Committee consists of the officers of the Association of Agricultural College Editors and a few other editors to insure regional representation. At its meeting in Washington it consults with information workers and others, analyzes problems of relationships and procedures, and participates in planning ways to solve them, thus bringing together the USDA and State extension services on mutually satisfactory methods of handling information. Its recommendations have always been practical, have been accepted and put into operation, and have been extremely helpful in making information more effective from the point of view of service to the farmer.

Copies of the 1945 recommendations were sent to State extension directors. Most of the recommendations concerned purely information methods and procedures. Among those in which State extension directors might be interested are recommendations for:

- (a) Evaluation by USDA and State extension services of their various information services with a view to eliminating those that are not essential and to improving general quality.
- (b) Initiation by proper administrative officials of a series of field studies to determine the effectiveness of publications, news, radio, and visual materials.
- (c) More information based on research to be made available for localization through the weekly news service, radio transcriptions, farm flash, and other services. Less emphasis on campaign materials.
- (d) Consideration by administrators of the problem of policy in tying the USDA and Extension information in with commercial organizations (Farm Safety Council, National F-H Committee, Country Gentleman, etc.).
- (e) Continuation and expansion of all services providing national agricultural information which permit localization and adaptation at the State level.
- (f) More evaluation of publications with reference to readability, whether they reach the intended audience, and whether they are read.
- (g) Establishing a motion picture exchange to enable each State to know what films other States are planning, to review the films when produced, and to purchase prints when the subject matter applies.
- (h) Encouraging States to employ full-time visual specialists.
- (i) Considering the importance of properly selecting post-war planning topics for publicizing.....that emphasis should properly be placed upon problems growing out of the war, such as population shifts, job opportunities, production adjustments, price adjustments, inflation control, and the reconversion of industry.....that care should be taken in handling post-war information so that it will not appear as though the Government were endorsing or forecasting specific programs of action or policy...that post-war planning should not be treated as a campaign.